Rhode Island • English Language Arts

DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

NECAP and Local Reading GLEs. Adopted June 10, 2004; Revised April 2007.
Accessed from: http://www.ride.ri.gov/Instruction/gle.aspx

NECAP and Local Written and Oral GLEs. Adopted June 10, 2004; Revised April 2007.
Accessed from: http://www.ride.ri.gov/Instruction/gle.aspx

Overview

Rhode Island's standards address some important content in the areas of analyzing literary texts, and listening and speaking, but overall the standards are too repetitive and not specific enough to communicate clear priorities and rigorous content.

GRADE **D**

Clarity and Specificity:	1/3
Content and Rigor:	3/7
Total Score:	**4/10**

(Common Core Grade: B+)

General Organization

Rhode Island's standards are organized into two strands, Reading and Written and Oral Communication. Each strand is divided into several sub-strands. These are divided into grade by grade standards for Kindergarten through eighth grade. At the high school level, standards are offered for tenth and twelfth grades (but not ninth or eleventh).

The standards document specifies which standards are to be assessed locally and which will be assessed through the New England Common Assessment Program (NECAP), a multi-state common assessment consortium.

Clarity and Specificity

Although Rhode Island offers grade-by-grade standards, many of these are repeated across grades, sowing confusion about what students are expected to master at each grade level. For example, "Identifying possible motives of main characters" is a literary text standard in both grades 2 and 3. At grades 4 and 5, it becomes "Identifying causes or effects, including possible motives of characters," which does not change the fundamental expectation, nor make clear what other kinds of causes and effects the standards developers might have in mind.

Many standards are repeated nearly verbatim across multiple grades, such as this "personal response" standard, which appears essentially unchanged from Kindergarten through grade 5:

> Comparing stories or other texts to related personal experience, prior knowledge, or to other texts (grades K-5)

The following writing standard is also repeated across grades 5-12:

> Demonstrates the habit of writing by:
> - Writing with frequency, including in-school, out-of-school, and during the summer
> - Sharing thoughts, observations, or impressions
> - Generating topics for writing
> - Writing in a variety of genres (grades 5-12)

The excessive repetition of vague standards such as these makes the scope and sequence very difficult to glean, thus earning Rhode Island one point out of three for Clarity and Specificity. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

Content and Rigor

Content Strengths

Rhode Island's standards for analyzing literary texts do a fair job of covering much necessary content, as in this eighth-grade standard:

> Examining characterization (e.g., stereotype, antagonist, protagonist), motivation, or interactions (including relationships), citing thoughts, words, or actions that reveal character traits, motivations, or changes over time (grade 8)

It would be better if the state had tried to communicate the quality and complexity of reading that students should be doing when undertaking this literary analysis, but at least most literary genres and elements are mentioned, either in standards or in examples.

Rhode Island also does a decent job of outlining expectations for listening and speaking, including active listening, effective speaking, and productive group discussions. The state also includes standards for oral presentations, as in this grade 10 standard:

> Includ[e] smooth transitions, support thesis with well-chosen details, and provid[e] a coherent conclusion.
>
> EXAMPLES (of support and elaboration): Us[e] anecdotes, analogies, illustrations, visuals, detailed descriptions, restatements, paraphrases, examples, comparisons, artifacts (grade 10)

Evaluation criteria for oral presentations are not included, but detailed examples are included of expected characteristics of presentations.

Content Weaknesses

Rhode Island's early reading standards appear to cover the right content, but ultimately fall short in defining a complete sequence of phonological awareness, phonics, and comprehension skills. Consider, for example, the following grade two "Word Identification Skills and Strategies" standard:

> Read regularly spelled one- or two-syllable words using knowledge of sounds and letter patterns (grade 2)

In general, the standards for phonemic awareness and phonics are similarly thin. Two sets of reading strategies are included, as is a category called "Breadth of Reading," which contains several sub-categories of expectations about reading habits. Unfortunately, the expectations delineated in these sections are not measurable. Fluency standards are perfunctory, as are the vocabulary standards, which often remain unchanged throughout the grades. One red flag is that the vocabulary standards include multiple strategies for "unlocking meaning," so that word analysis is only one among many strategies (which also include using context clues like illustrations and diagrams). Etymology is not mentioned until twelfth grade.

Rhode Island includes a section called "Suggested Print and Non-Print Informational and Literary Texts—for Instruction and Assessment," yet it does not actually suggest any texts, only categories of texts, as in this fifth-grade statement:

> Poetry, plays, fairytales, fantasy, fables, realistic fiction, folktales, historical fiction, mysteries, etc. (grade 5)

Nowhere is the quality and complexity of reading material ever described, nor is there any mention of the study of American literature.

Informational text is treated cursorily, with an emphasis on "reference" and "practical/functional" documents. Even in high school, only one standard addresses arguments (and it is repeated in both grades 10 and 12):

> Evaluating the clarity and accuracy of information (e.g., consistency, effectiveness of organizational pattern, or logic of arguments) (grades 10 and 12)

Rhode Island's writing standards omit much important content. A single writing process standard is repeated across grades, and "habits of writing" standards, which include unmeasurable tasks such as "generating topics for writing," are also repeated across grades. A "Structures of Language" category touches only lightly on sentence and paragraph

structures. Where one might expect to see the characteristics of good writing described by genre, the standards focus chiefly on such generic writing skills as "stating and maintaining a focus." Categories nominally address "narrative" and "informational" writing of all kinds, but the standards continue to focus on generic skills, such as "writing about observations and experiences" or "providing a concluding statement."

At the high school level, many standards are devoted to narrative writing, poetry, and reflective essays, but few are devoted to the structure and characteristics of good arguments or persuasive writing.

Standards for "Applying Rules of Grammar, Usage and Mechanics" do not address any specific content in grades K-5, except to say that students should be "identify[ing] grammatical errors when given examples" or "apply[ing] basic capitalization rules." In high school, a bit more content is included in the examples, but again that content is largely repeated across grades.

The research sub-category includes only minimalistic standards. For example, the research process is not detailed thoroughly, nor do these standards address the characteristics of final research products, such as proper citation of sources.

In a very few places, the Rhode Island standards include specific content, but in a form that is not necessarily useful to teachers. Long lists (for example, of literary devices) are included, but the same lists are repeated at multiple grade levels, and although the specificity is welcome, it is hard to determine what the priorities are for students at each grade level. The end result is a document that is not particularly rigorous.

Such omissions leave more than 50 percent of the critical K-12 ELA content missing, thus earning Rhode Island three points out of seven for Content and Rigor. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

The Bottom Line

With their grade of D, Rhode Island's ELA standards are among the worst in the country, while those developed by the Common Core State Standards Initiative earn a solid B-plus. The CCSS ELA standards are significantly superior to what the Ocean State has in place today.

Rhode Island • Mathematics

DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

Rhode Island K-8 Mathematics Grade-Level Expectations. June 2006; updated August 2, 2007. Accessed from: http://www.ride.ri.gov/Instruction/DOCS/gle/GLE%20pdf/FINAL/RI_Math_K-8_GLEs_Final_Version_PDF.pdf

Rhode Island High School Grade-Span Expectations. May 2006; updated August 2, 2007. Accessed from: http://www.ride.ri.gov/Instruction/DOCS/gle/GLE%20pdf/FINAL/RI_Math_High_School_GSEs_Final_Version_PDF.pdf

Overview

Rhode Island's standards are poorly organized and extremely difficult to read. In the elementary grades, arithmetic is neither prioritized nor well developed. The high school standards contain some rigorous content, but it is not presented coherently and its coverage is incomplete.

GRADE **D**

Clarity and Specificity:	1/3
Content and Rigor:	3/7
Total Score:	**4/10**

(Common Core Grade: A-)

General Organization

The K-8 standards are organized into four content strands such as "Number and Operations" and "Functions and Algebra." Each content strand is divided into topics, and the topics are common across several grades. In addition, standards within a topic begin with the same stem phrase across grades. For example, the following stem phrase is used to begin standards in the Number and Operations strand:

> Demonstrates conceptual understanding of mathematical operations through investigations involving...(grades K-3)

High school is organized similarly except the grades are combined into 9-10, 11-12, and "Advanced Mathematics."

Finally, the state provides process standards, such as "problem solving" and "reasoning and proof," which are meant to be integrated into instruction.

Clarity and Specificity

The use of the same stem phrase (bolded below) for all grades is poorly implemented and makes the standards difficult to read. For example, the following standard about using simple comparisons is bizarrely stated as a standard about data trends:

> **Analyzes patterns, trends, or distributions in data in a variety of contexts by determining or using** more, less, or equal (grades K-2) (emphasis original)

Many standards suffer from excessive length and complexity, such as:

> **Demonstrates understanding of the relative magnitude of numbers** from 0 to 199 by ordering whole numbers; by comparing whole numbers to each other or to benchmark whole numbers (10, 25, 50, 75, 100, 125, 150, or 175); by demonstrating an understanding of the relation of inequality when comparing whole numbers by using "1 more," "1 less," "10 more," "10 less," "100 more," or "100 less"; or by connecting number words and numerals to the quantities they represent using models, number lines, or explanations (grade 2) (emphasis original)

> **Identifies and extends to specific cases a variety of patterns** (linear and nonlinear) represented in models, tables, sequences, graphs, or in problem situations; and generalizes a linear relationship using words and symbols; **generalizes a linear relationship to find a specific case**; or writes an expression or equation using words or symbols to express the generalization of a nonlinear relationship (grade 7) (emphasis original)

Besides the overall lack of clarity, the phrase "generalizes a linear relationship to find a specific case" is mathematically backwards.

Some clearly stated content expectations are buried within the overly long standards. For example, the following standard is packed with good content:

> **Demonstrates conceptual understanding of algebraic expressions by** manipulating, evaluating, and simplifying algebraic and numerical expressions; adding, subtracting, multiplying and dividing polynomials; adding, subtracting, multiplying and dividing rational expressions; simplifying complex fractions; factoring quadratic and higher degree polynomials, including difference of squares; applying properties of logarithms (e.g., $\log_a b^n = n\log_a b$, $a^{\log_a b} = b$) and converting between logarithmic and exponential forms; manipulating, evaluating, and simplifying expressions involving rational exponents and radicals and converting between expressions with rational exponents and expressions with radicals (grades 11 and 12) (emphasis original)

Another problem with the high school standards is that material on related topics such as quadratics or exponentials is scattered incoherently across various strands.

The standards are difficult to read and interpret and rarely clear. They offer "limited guidance to users" and receive a Clarity and Specificity score of one point out of three. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

Content and Rigor

Content Priorities

Rhode Island does not provide specific guidance about content priorities. That said, priorities can be gleaned by evaluating the number of standards devoted to a particular content area. Essential arithmetic content comprises fewer than 30 percent of the standards in the crucial elementary grades, which inadequately prioritizes this essential content.

What's more, while attention to arithmetic is minimal, the standards focus attention on less important topics such as geometric reflections in grades 3-7 and 9-12.

Content Strengths

The standards cover the structure of arithmetic such as commutativity, associativity, and distributivity as well as the inverse nature of addition and subtraction and of multiplication and division. The number line is used throughout.

In high school, the standards include some rigorous content despite the poor organization. For example, they cover completing the square for quadratic equations and the arithmetic of polynomials and rational expressions.

Content Weaknesses

The development of arithmetic is weak. The introduction to the Number strand states,

> Having students know basic facts and having students compute fluently (i.e., accurately and efficiently) continues to be an important goal in mathematics education

However, knowing basic facts and having computational fluency is not supported in the standards themselves.

> Mentally adds and subtracts whole number facts through 20; multiplies whole number facts to a product of 100 (grade 4)

Mentally computing is not instant recall. The standards do not adequately specify that students have automaticity, or quick recall, of basic number facts. These are the basic building blocks for future mathematics; students who are still struggling with basic facts are not prepared to move on to the next level of mathematics. For addition and subtraction, the capstone standard is as follows:

> Accurately solves problems involving addition and subtraction with regrouping; the concept of multiplication; and addition or subtraction of decimals (in the context of money) (grade 3)

Although a desirable standard, it does not mention fluency or the use of standard algorithms.

Similarly for multiplication, only a parenthetical remark appears:

> Accurately solves problems involving multiple operations on whole numbers or the use of the properties of factors and multiples; and addition or subtraction of decimals and positive proper fractions with like denominators. (Multiplication limited to 2 digits by 2 digits, and division limited to 1 digit divisors.) (grade 4)

High school content is missing basic material on some important topics. The material on linear equations omits point-slope form and finding the equation for a line given two points. The various forms of quadratic equations and finding the vertex are not explicitly presented.

In the elementary grades, arithmetic is neither prioritized nor well developed. High school coverage is better, but is still missing some essential content. These serious problems result in a Content and Rigor score of three points out of seven. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

The Bottom Line

With their grade of D, Rhode Island's mathematics standards are among the worst in the country, while those developed by the Common Core State Standards Initiative earn an impressive A-minus. The CCSS math standards are vastly superior to what the Ocean State has in place today.